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## NEW LIGHTS ON BIBLICAL GREEK.

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SOMETHING very much like a revolution has been coming over the study of the Greek in which the New Testament was written. All who have studied the subject know how widely the successive generations of scholars have differed in their view of the most important dialect in the literary history of the world. One age had a craze for defending the classical correctness of the New Testament writers; another, for recognizing Hebraisms everywhere. Winer brought in an era of common-sense, and gradually the true aspect of the sacred writers' language has been emerging from the clouds of artificial theories which formerly enveloped it. One exceedingly important discovery has been fruitful of results—the intimate relation between the New Testament Greek and the Greek spoken today. It was almost a novel idea when Dr. Moulton used it in the notes to his English "Winer" thirty years ago, and it is far from being worked out now. But a great step has been taken when we have realized that the Greek of Aristophanes and the Greek of the modern folk-song are connected by a steady development; and that the Greek of Paul, though so much nearer the other end of the development in time, stands in its essential characteristics not far from the middle of the line joining the two. But before we can examine this question we must determine where the Greek of Paul stands in relation to the Greek of his contemporaries. Is his language (1) "biblical" Greek, or (2) "Judean" Greek, or (3) "common" Greek? In other words, did he (1) write in a kind of sacred dialect, based mostly on Greek created by the translators of the Old Testament? or (2), was his the ordinary speech of a Jew who had learned Greek, while still generally thinking in Hebrew? or (3) do we find in his epistles, and in other New Testament writings where direct

translation from the Aramaic or Hebrew is not in question, merely the normal everyday language spoken throughout the Greek world in the fourth century after the close of the golden age of Attic literature?

What we may fairly regard as a final answer to this question has been made possible within the last decade by the immense finds of Greek papyri in Egypt. There were papyrus collections before, but they were scanty by comparison with those which are pouring from English and German workshops in our own time. Those who have read the three huge volumes of Berlin papyri, the *Corpus* of the Archduke Rainer's collection, the small but early and important set of documents named after Dr. Flinders Petrie, the two goodly volumes of *British Museum Papyri* as re-edited by Dr. Kenyon, and the six superbly edited volumes of Drs. Grenfell and Hunt, will feel that they have been moving in a new world. It is a world which must be viewed from many sides. Scholars have been busy with its antiquities and its historical problems, and not infrequently their results have had deep interest for the biblical student—witness, for example, Ramsay's *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem?*

But beyond comparison the most important result of these finds for us has been one entirely independent of subject-matter—the grammar and vocabulary of the documents, which teach us for the first time what was the ordinary speech of the people during the centuries covered by the papyri. To a certain extent we knew this before. We had a plentiful literature from the periods most important for the student of the Greek Bible. But how were we to know where an author was deliberately artificial, copying accurately or inaccurately those Athenian models which were always supposed to exhaust all the possibilities of a perfect literary style? We had inscriptions, great masses of them. The student's resources in this direction are still growing, and so is the consciousness of their value. But even inscriptions are not by any means perfect representatives of the popular speech; a more or less stilted style is likely to invade monuments whose very material proclaims that they were meant to last. The papyri have the immense advantage of letting us catch the people in undress uniform. Many of them are,

of course, formal. There are wills, official reports, census returns, receipts, etc., in which we have a large supply of standing formulæ. But there are also letters, petitions, and other entirely informal documents, in which we may feel quite certain that we are reading the words and phrases which the writers used in daily life. Here is the colloquial dialect unmistakably, and nothing could be better suited for comparison with literary documents when we want to find out how far they are written in the unadorned style of ordinary speech.

The great opportunity of pioneering in this field of research was seized by Dr. G. Adolf Deissmann, now professor of theology at Heidelberg. In his *Bibelstudien* (1895) and *Neue Bibelstudien* (1897) he examined the phraseology of the papyri and some of the inscriptions of the Hellenistic period with great acuteness and decisive results. The material has been growing fast even in the last four years, so that in not a few details Deissmann's case needs restating already. But the evidence of the fresh material points steadily in the same direction, and all we have been able to glean from the papyri published since Deissmann wrote seems to us only to show that there is a strong presumption in favor of his theory even in places where it has not yet received confirmation. The English edition, just published, promises us a third series of "Bible Studies," and we cannot doubt that many other workers will enter this field, assured of finding something which will throw light on New Testament Greek.

Let us try to indicate the general character of this new material. No attempt will be made to outline Deissmann's book, for few will be content to leave it unread now that it has appeared in English. To begin with, there is the general result that New Testament Greek is proved to be essentially the normal Greek current in Egypt, Asia Minor, and Greece proper during the first century A. D. The idea of a "biblical" Greek, or a "Judean" Greek, is finally exploded.<sup>1</sup> Expressions which

<sup>1</sup> *A priori*, we should expect to find dialectic differences in the *Koinê*, and Judean Greek might well have been a separate variety. As a matter of fact, the differences prove almost imperceptible. See chap. v in THUMB'S important work, *Die griechische Sprache im Zeitalter des Hellenismus* (1901).

the soberest scholars regarded as Hebraisms have been found in Greek documents which proceed from quarters entirely untouched by Semitic influence. Practically the "Hebraism" must all but disappear from our grammars and commentaries except where direct translation comes in, and even there it may often happen that it was ignorance of Hebrew, not ignorance of Greek, which was responsible for renderings hopelessly foreign to Greek idiom. Take an extreme example, the well-known blunder of Aquila by which the Hebrew *'eth*, the sign of the accusative, is confused with *'eth*, "with," and translated *σύν*. Does not "every schoolboy" do the like in his early days at Latin? and do we not rightly set it down to his defective Latin, taking refuge in what he believes to be literal rendering, rather than (say) to a slang-perversed English? Genuine Hebraisms in translated Hebrew may therefore be explained in two very different ways. But when we find in Paul's Greek, for instance, usages which the papyri forbid us any longer to regard as Hebraisms, and a practically complete absence of anything suggesting that the writer wrote Greek as a foreigner, we are forced to some far-reaching deductions. That Paul learned Greek as a child, perhaps even earlier than he learned Hebrew, does not surprise us; but what about Palestinian Jews? Did they learn Greek in childhood, too? If they did, we have accepted the bilingual theory. If they did not, how did they contrive to write so perfectly the current Greek of the day?

Many consequences follow from this view of the language in which the apostles wrote. It is clear that we must base our grammatical and lexical investigations more and more upon the literary and popular monuments of the "common" Greek which have come down to us. Only in the last resort are we at liberty to assume the use of a locution which would not have been intelligible to those who had not Hebrew at the back of their minds; and some fresh papyrus may any day sweep that away. It is not without deep significance that we thus find Providence preparing a language practically without dialectic differences, understood throughout the civilized world, and ready for the preaching of a religion which claimed universal dominion over the sons of men.

A large part of Deissmann's book is occupied with direct illustration of biblical phrases from the papyri. In very many cases this only means that words and phrases once supposed exclusively "biblical" are now shown to belong to the ordinary vernacular. To find in inscriptions or in Egyptian papers such phrases as τὸ ἐπιβάλλον μέρος, συνᾶραι λόγον,<sup>2</sup> εἰ μὴν, ἐξιλάσασθαι ἁμαρτίαν, εἰς τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ὄνομα, ἐνώπιόν τινος, οὐχ ὁ τυχών, ἐκ συμφώνου, αἵρειν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου, κατ' ἐπιταγήν,<sup>2</sup> etc., is interesting mainly because it brings out the identity of New Testament and ordinary Hellenistic Greek. But often the coincidence is a valuable illustration. Thus υἱὸς θεοῦ as a title of the emperors is very suggestive when we look at the centurion's exclamation in Matt. 27: 54. Καταντᾶν εἰς τινα, of property "descending to" an heir,<sup>2</sup> materially helps the exegesis of 1 Cor. 10: 11. The formula ἀπέχω, normal in receipts, brings out the meaning of ἀπέχουσι τὸν μισθόν in the Sermon on the Mount. The perpetual recurrence of the form 'A. ὁ καὶ B., especially in the case of Egyptians who used a native and a Greek name, settles finally—if it needs settling—the meaning of Σαῦλος ὁ καὶ Παῦλος. The meaning of χάραγμα in Rev. 13: 16 is immensely helped by the imperial seal of Augustus, given in facsimile by Deissmann, which "contains the name of the emperor and the year of his reign, was necessary upon documents relating to buying, selling, etc., and was technically known as χάραγμα." Ἀρετή = δόξα in 2 Pet. 1: 3 is made extremely probable by evidence culled from inscriptions and literary sources. In connection with this may be mentioned the remarkable coincidences which Deissmann exhibits between the language of 2 Peter and an inscription of Stratonicea in Caria, of the early imperial period, which apparently contains a number of phrases belonging to the official liturgical language of Asia Minor: it is, however, at least plausible to find direct dependence of the author of 2 Peter upon this decree, which "the mosaic-like character of the writer's work, specially evident in his relation to the epistle of Jude," makes less strange than it would be in the case of other writers.

<sup>2</sup> See the present writer in the *Expositor* for April, 1901, pp. 271 ff.

It is tempting to quote more examples of words and phrases which have been made clearer for us by the parallels brought from these new sources, but these specimens will suffice. The papyri supply other kinds of material which we must mention before closing this sketch. The extent to which epistolary formulæ are found in the New Testament was never conjectured until the Egyptian explorations gave us whole collections of ancient letters, all the better for our purpose in that they were most obviously written with no eye to publication. It gives us a curious sensation to find in letters from heathens to heathens Pauline or Johannine phrases in which we should never have imagined that the apostle was merely galvanizing into life an old formula. "I salute all the friends by name." "I make my prayer for you (*τὸ προσκύνημά σου ποιῶ*) daily before the Lord Sarapis"—"making mention of you before the gods"—"day and night I make supplication to the god on your behalf"—"before all things I pray that you may be in health"—these and other phrases in papyrus letters give a curious new light when we look into the epistles of the New Testament and find their analogues there.

Sundry reflections occur to one after reading such a book as Deissmann's, or studying at first hand the medley of documents out of which this acute and diligent scholar has taken his spoil. We have seen that the language of the earliest Christian teachers was the "common" Greek which formed the medium of communication over nearly the whole of the civilized world, without any appreciable admixture of that which was peculiar to the Jew. We have seen how sacred writers were not afraid to use phrases and formulæ hitherto associated with pagan life and even pagan religion. It makes us understand as never before the marvel of that universalism which, as it were, sprang full-grown from the head of the most particularist religion the world has ever seen. The men who preached were Galileans, but from the day of their baptism with the Holy Spirit they began to speak to all the world in the dialect which all the world knew, and the sacred language in which the venerated Scriptures had been written passes out of sight forever as the language of God's voice to

men. "In the Hebrew tongue" the Savior speaks from heaven to Saul of Tarsus, that the converted persecutor may fling aside his Hebrew name, and with his Roman name and Roman citizenship go out to preach in Greek a gospel which has forever burst the bonds of language and nationality. The rigid and exclusive Jew has—marvel of marvels!—learned henceforth to call no one common or unclean. The proud "I am a Jew" has given place to "I am a man, and nothing human is foreign to me."

The results of this new departure for the New Testament student and exegete have been more or less indicated as we have gone along. It is hardly too much to say that every department of sacred study must feel the influence of the new methods. The theologian will have to re-examine his technical terms in the light of their occurrence in what we may no longer call "profane" Greek. The grammarian must strive toward a systematic and historical view of the "common" Greek as a whole, and bring New Testament phenomena into line with those observable in trivial scraps rescued from Egyptian rubbish-heaps. The historian must be constantly on the lookout for sidelights on the history and the antiquities of the first Christian century such as these contemporary documents can often furnish. And even the preacher, if he understands his function to be that of eagerly gathering up the apparent trifles of Holy Writ and bringing out their message for the present day, will find in this new material many a subject not too recondite for a sermon. A new Cremer, a new Thayer-Grimm, a new Winer will give the twentieth century plenty of editing to keep its scholars busy. New Meyers and Alford's will have fresh matter from which to interpret the text, and new Spurgeons and Moodys will, we may hope, be ready to pass the new teaching on to the people. And once again behind new methods and new theories will be seen standing unchanged the old book, to which every generation supplies fresh keys, without unlocking more than a few of its treasure-chambers that remain for ages of the future to spoil for the ceaselessly changing needs of men.